

Appleby Archaeology Group

The first meeting of the autumn saw members of the Appleby Archaeology Group visiting the County Records Office in Kendal where they enjoyed an informative evening under the guidance of Richard Hall Assistant County Archivist.

He began by explaining the functions of the Record Office and describing the type of records kept.

Kendal Office is one of four in the county and each houses the records of what were the constituent counties pre 1974, Kendal housing the records of what was Westmorland. The other offices are in Carlisle, Whitehaven and Barrow. The four offices provide a decentralised service reflecting the old counties. There are two other offices in Carlisle, a modern records unit and a conservation unit. When the Kendal office first opened in 1962 the records were stored and cared for, but there was no service to the public as there is today.

The records kept cover a period of 800 years, the earliest are from Appleby. Certain records have to be deposited, these include all public records such as local authority records and those of the bodies which predated these authorities. All parish records over 100 years old have to be deposited. Kendal has a range of church records from Tudor times which give insight into everyday life. The majority of the records held are "unofficial" these include family and business records which have been given to the office for safekeeping at no charge to the owner but on the understanding that they are available to the public. There is a closure period of 100 years on confidential documents such as criminal and health records.

Mr Hall then spent a little time explaining how to make best use of the facilities before he took half of the group to see where and how some of the records are stored while the others had the opportunity to study the interesting selection of documents on display.

The archives on display all referred to the Appleby area and included items from the Hothfield Collection which covers a period extending from the middle ages to 1962. These records are an exceptional resource both locally and nationally. The three Great Books of Records are Lady Anne Clifford's conscientious attempt to record the history of the Clifford family. Three copies of each of the three books were made, one for Appleby, one for Skipton and one for her London residence. The group were able to look at copy of the First Book of Records and at a copy of an account book kept by Lady Anne. Her will was also on display.

There were a number of maps which seemed to intrigue everyone, one of the earliest from the Crackenthorpe Family Archives was of the Kirby Thore Temple Sowerby area in the 16th century. The Burgh records of Appleby from 1614 to 1974 are stored, the earliest burgage record of rents is dated 1528. One of the earliest parish registers from St Michael's Bongate is dated 1580. Parish registers vary in the detail they contain as there was no standard form until 1812. Several of the Charters given to Appleby were on display including the first granted in 1179 and one from 1685 from King James II which refers to a horse fair, but probably not the horse fair that continues to this day.

A fascinating insight was gained both into the role of Record Offices and what is available in Kendal. A warm vote of thanks was expressed to Richard Hall.

Phyllis Rouston 8/10/2001